HERMENEUTICS AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

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There has been a vast proliferation of material regarding the position of women in Christian society. Four distinguishable positions may be identified: (1) Women are subordinate to men and cannot have positions of authority in the Church; (2) women are subordinate to men but may have positions of authority in the Church; (3) women are equal to men and should have positions of authority in the Church; and (4) women are equal to men and should not have positions of authority. Three NT passages specifically deal with this problem: 1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:34-36 and 1 Tim 2:8-15. Three others deal with the principle behind the issue by discussing the husband-wife relation: Eph 5:22-33, Col 3:18, 19 and 1 Pet 3:1-7.

I. THE HERMENEUTICAL BASIS

It is the contention of this article that the determining factor in the discussion is hermeneutical and relates to one's interpretation of all the command passages in Scripture. When the debate is finished, the conclusions depend on one's approach to the above passages.[1] We might delineate three different hermeneutical stances: (1) All the Biblical command passages are literal and normative and must be obeyed; (2) all the command passages are cultural and can only be reinterpreted with regard to problems today; and (3) both cultural and normative commands are found in Scripture, and we must decide which category an individual command fits before we apply it to this age. Examples of the first category would be some Plymouth Brethren or Mennonite sects, such as the Haldemann Mennonites, who celebrate foot washing and "holy kissing"[2] at their communion services. The second group would be represented by Joseph Fletcher and his "situation ethics," which argues that the only command is love and that each situation must be handled individually. Most evangelicals would fall into the third category.

We can readily dismiss the second category on the basis of inspiration. The Bible must be more than a relative collection of individual religious experiences. If it has any authority at all, it is relevant for today. But the first approach is more difficult to negate. However, there are some considerations that argue for a recognition of cultural

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[1]This, of course, does not obviate such questions as whether Gal 3:28 is the NT reversal of Gen 3:16b (on this see below). However, the presence of subordination in the above passages certainly has a bearing on these related issues.

[2]Note that even here they do not take a literal view of this command, for they practice it only at communion service, not daily.

application in the NT itself. Each of the epistles was written to meet a specific problem in the first-century Church. When we study these religious principles in the light of their cultural and sociological context, we discover a complex interplay between cultural and normative in the early Church.[3]

Once we have accepted this hermeneutic, however, we discover it is not so easy to distinguish between the timeless principles and their cultural applications within individual parenetic passages. But one thing has been too often neglected in the debate: We dare not isolate the passages on women in the Church from the other Biblical injunctions. What we need is a series of covering laws to distinguish the eternal core from the cultural application in all the commands of Scripture and *then* apply these to the sections on women in the Church. Here we would like to discuss two categories: (1) general hermeneutical principles for determining NT teaching; and (2) specific precepts for distinguishing cultural from normative in individual sections.

A. *General Principles*

1. Didactic passages must be used to interpret historical events. This must relate both to the gospels or Acts as interpreted by the epistles and to historical problems reflected in the epistles. The latter is especially crucial to the problem at hand. One key to distinguishing the cultural is to note the historical background behind the problem and decide what aspect of the command controls the problem and what is controlled by it.[4] For instance, Paul's order in 1 Cor 5:5 to "deliver" the man caught in incest "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" is not intended to exemplify the type of discipline the Church is to employ at all times. Rather, the specific punishment is controlled by the situation, but the use of discipline is normative in the Church.

2. "Passages which deal with an issue systematically are used to help understand incidental references elsewhere."[5] This is true with regard to both doctrinal and parenetic passages. With respect to the former, the creedal hymn, Phil 2:6-11, would provide the early Church's theological background in dealing with the incarnation as a basis for Gal 4:4-5. As for Biblical injunctions, one would interpret Paul's use of the creation narratives in 1 Cor 11:8-9 and 1 Tim 2:13-14 on the basis of Gen 1-3 and Rom 5:12-21 rather than on the basis of those verses by themselves. To take a mere allusion to a teaching as consti-

[3]An example of this would be Christ's choice of twelve male disciples, which has often been used as a proof-text for male ministers. However, at the same time they were also all Jews; yet no one would suggest that Paul was wrong in selecting Timothy, a Gentile, to assist him.

[4]K. Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 18-22, has a good discussion regarding the difficulty of interpreting circumstantial events as eternally valid truths. He uses the example of Matt 10:6 that Jesus was sent only to the house of Israel. This did not become a binding norm for the Church. Stendahl goes too far, however, when he talks of a "culturally bound" Bible and comes perilously close to the second hermeneutical category above.

[5]See N. Hardesty and L. Scanzoni, *All We're Meant To Be* (Waco: Word, 1974) 18.

tuting the developed doctrine would be to read in too much of one's own theology.

3. Passages must be interpreted in the light of their context. This cannot be overemphasized, for the historical and literary contexts of any passage are crucial to an understanding of the author's intention. The so-called "contradiction" between Paul and James regarding faith and works is a prime example of this. When one understands the diverse contextual perspectives of Ephesians 2 and James 2, the differences are minimized. We must discover the author's meaning before we try to determine the application of his statements to this age.

B. *Specific Principles*

1. The tools of redaction criticism will help distinguish what comes from early Church tradition from what was a temporary application to a specific problem. To list a few of these criteria:[6] (a) Those statements that can clearly be attested in other early Christian literature are traditional; (b) Semitic features may point to a primitive Palestinian origin; (c) that which exhibits the eschatological emphases of the Aramaic Church stems from the earliest period; (d) unintentional divergences from the writer's normal ways of expressing his thoughts may point to normative material.[7] While these will not distinguish the binding laws from the temporal injunctions, they will help one recognize when a writer is borrowing from earlier teaching, and this is turn will show that the teaching does not result from the current situation.

2. Teaching that transcends the cultural biases of the author and his readers will be normative.[8] As Stendahl says,[9] "Does the New Testament contain elements, glimpses which point beyond and even 'against' the prevailing view and practice of the New Testament church?" Here the prime illustration is the application of Gal 3:28 and Philemon to the slavery issue. In Paul's day those statements were not understood to derogate slavery, but eventually the institution of slavery was undermined by the implications of them. The parallels between this and the woman's role are obvious, both from the Galatians reference and from the presence of the two side-by-side in the *Haustafeln* sections.

3. If a command is wholly tied to a cultural situation that is not timeless in itself, it will probably be a temporary application rather

[6]Redactional tools, of course, have normally been applied to the gospels rather than the epistles. However, they are just as applicable in tracing tradition in the epistles, as evidenced by recent work done on the NT creeds. E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (New York: Macmillan, 1947²) 387-388, 467-468, applies creedal criteria to the *Haustafeln* passages, including 1 Tim 2:8-9.

[7]We have mentioned only those principles applicable to the epistles. For a good discussion of the field, see R. N. Longenecker, "Literary Criteria in Life of Jesus Research: An Evaluation and Proposal," *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 217-229.

[8]Here I am indebted to B. Krahn, "The Role of Women in the Church" (unpublished guided research paper, Winnipeg Bible College, 1976) 16-18.

[9]K. Stendahl, *Bible*, p. 34.

than an eternal norm. Here we arrive at a difficult hermeneutical task, for one's decision depends on the degree of connection between the situation and the injunction. Nevertheless, when combined with the hermeneutical tools above, this can help the scholar determine how much a command is tied to the predicament. One of the best methods is to note the language employed by the author in the injunction itself. If the writer unconsciously uses terms that tie the command to the current problem, it will indicate a high degree of cultural application.

The difficulty of determining this can be seen by considering the question of foot washing. In itself, it is tied to the ancient practice of washing the dust off a traveler's feet before he entered the house. The cultural customs made the act itself a humbling experience; it could not be required of a Jewish slave and normally the guest washed his own feet.[10] The wording of John 13:1-20 (especially vv 14-15) has been taken by many in Christendom to be a sacramental command.[11] The answer must be found by applying the criteria above to the passage. We note first of all that Jesus calls it an "example" (v 15), so it is doubtful whether Christ instituted it as an ordinance. Secondly, a redactional study of the pericope shows that its purpose was threefold: (1) to symbolize the cleansing of the believer (v 10); (2) to illustrate the humility of the believer (vv 15-17); and (3) to prophesy of Jesus' coming death (vv 10, 11, 18, 19). These show that the normative teaching of the passage deals with the humility and cleansing of the believer rather than the institution of an ordinance. The act itself was symbolic, interpreted in light of current cultural meaning, and is not required of believers today.

4. Those commands that have proven detrimental to the cause of Christ in later cultures must be reinterpreted. This is mentioned last because it depends on the above criteria, as they show that the command itself was tied to the first-century cultural situation. We dare not dismiss a command simply because the times are against it. If we were to attempt this, all the ethics of Scripture would be discarded in this un-Christian age. However, this becomes helpful in re-examining the normativeness of a command. For example, the oft-commanded "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26) came to be a tremendous problem when the oriental custom disappeared. The repercussions were obvious, and it ceased to be practiced. The loving greeting is normative, but the particular cultural method is not.

II. THE EXEGETICAL EVIDENCE

A. *1 Corinthians 11:2-16*

This passage commands a woman not to "pray or prophesy" with

[10]See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 2. 564-565, for a more detailed discussion.

[11]1 Tim 5:10, according to advocates of this view, indicates the presence of this cultic act in the early Church. Also, the postapostolic Church understood it thus; Augustine states that it was practiced on Maundy Thursday (*Ep. ad Januarium*). Yet the Lutheran Church early condemned it as a "papal corruption." Today, apart from the groups mentioned earlier, it is not followed widely in Protestant circles.

her head "unveiled" (v 5) and is the basis for the current practice of wearing hats or kerchiefs in many Catholic, Brethren and Anabaptist groups. In determining the cultural setting, we must note that the custom itself was Jewish rather than Gentile. The modest Jewess was required to wear a covering over her hair (but not her face) in public. Prostitutes were not allowed to wear a "veil," and wives who went about uncovered were subject to divorce, for they were said to be renouncing their marriage.[12] However, this does not appear to be the case with regard to Greek custom, where veils were required in public but not in religious services (on the other hand, both Roman men and women covered their heads in worship). The exact situation is difficult to recover, and there are many anomalies.[13] We must suffice ourselves with the observation that we are definitely dealing with an important custom in the early Church.

In deciding the binding nature of this command, we must next examine the reasons Paul gives for continuing this practice. First, we note the strong emotive terms applying it to the cultural setting: To fail to obey is dishonourable (vv 4, 5), "disgraceful" (v 6), improper (v 13), "degrading" (v 14), "contentious" (v 16). In accordance with specific criterion number 3, this points to a cultural tie.

However, at the same time Paul points to the created order as the basis for the custom. This is taken by George Knight[14] as an indication that it is not tied to the cultural situation. He argues that since Paul uses the eternal order as the basis for the injunction, it is meant to be normative for all times. In this light we might note that Paul's argument here proceeds from creation rather than the fall, and this negates the argument of those who say that the man-woman distinction is the result of the fall and has been removed by the results of the cross, as noted in Gal 3:28 (on this, see further below).

At the same time Knight differentiates between "the expression of the principle at stake in a particular practice and the natural provision that God has made which expresses at all times the principle of God's order between male and female."[15] We must agree with him here; the argument from creation upholds the male-female distinction, and it is this latter which provides the theological basis for Paul's command.

Headship and glory are two other reasons. Headship (*kephalē*), as used in v 3, is difficult to define. It could refer to hierarchy of authority (Knight) or origin (Barrett, in connection with the Greek use of the term

[12]See R. C. Prohl, *Woman in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 27-28.

[13]Another lies in the fact that Paul says men should have their heads uncovered (vv 4, 7), while Talmudic practice was that men should cover their heads at worship. The most commonly mentioned solution is that the Talmudic custom began at a later time. It is hard to know why the early Church would change the custom for men but not for women. At the same time, the Church may have required the Jewish custom to distinguish Christian worship from pagan practice, where women regularly removed their veils. Those who argue for the binding nature of this practice use these anomalies as arguments against tying this command to the cultural situation, e. g., G. Inrig, *Life in His Body* (Wheaton: Shaw, 1975) 166.

[14]G. W. Knight, "The Role Relation of Man and Woman and the Teaching/Ruling Functions in the Church," *JETS* 18 (Spring, 1975) 81-91, esp. pp. 84-85.

[15]Ibid., p. 86.

and with vv 8, 9). Olthuis[16] is probably correct when he combines the two—"prominence" in relation to origin. This is illustrated in the chain of relationships in v 3: Christ over man, man over woman,[17] God over Christ. There is a certain subordinationism based on origin in each case. Christ is the creator of men, God the basis of Jesus' earthly ministry, and man the origin of woman's being (see below for the interlocking relationship between equality and hierarchy in these cases).

"Glory" (v 7) serves a similar purpose. While both men and women are the "image" (*eikon*) of God, only man is the "glory" (*doxa*) of God; "woman" is the "glory" of man. The main idea in the term is that of "radiance" or "reflection" and it is to be understood in the same sense as headship. The reference is to Gen 2:18-23 and means that Adam was given dominion over God's creation while Eve was made to "help" him.[18] The woman was to veil herself in worship because for her an unveiled head "would symbolize pride in her reflection of her humanity, which would be shameful and pretentious in the presence of God."[19]

Finally, there is the meaning of the veil as the "authority" or "power" (*exousia*) of the woman (v 10). Many older commentators (Hodge, Robertson and Plummer, *et al.*) took it as the sign of the husband's "authority" over the woman. However, in a classic article Morna Hooker[20] argued that it was the sign of the woman's "authority" to worship God as an equal with man. This makes a great deal of sense in the light of Gal 3:28, and most since have followed her suggestion. The added "because of the angels" probably refers to those angels who are present at worship and oversee God's order; they would be disturbed by women who asserted their independence from the Church's order of worship.

This view is supported by vv 11, 12, which re-emphasize the mutual dependence of men and women. It balances the hierarchical statements of vv 2-9 by showing that "in the Lord" (i. e., in the new order instituted by him) both are equal. Some recent writers have tried to interpret vv 2-9 on the basis of vv 11, 12, but one cannot say that the latter overturns the former. As Knight argues:[21] "Here again the role re-

[16]J. Olthuis, *I Pledge You My Troth* (New York: Harper, 1975) 137.

[17]There is some debate as to whether this is man-woman or husband-wife. However, the thrust of the passage would favor the broader reference. As G. W. Knight, "Role," p. 85, points out, vv 11, 12 view the relationship not in husband-wife but in parent-child terms.

[18]We must define "helpmate" carefully. There is no inferiority of being implied in the term *'ezer* (Gen. 2:18). Dick and Joyce Boldrey, "Women in Paul's Life," *Trinity Studies* 2 (1972) 12, point out that it is used often of God helping his people and occurs sixteen times in Scripture of a superior, five times of an equal, but never of an inferior. It refers to one who aids someone in need of help.

[19]D. and J. Boldrey, "Women," p. 14. If she were to unveil her head when in worship, she would be glorifying men rather than God.

[20]M. D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of I Cor. 11:10," *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 410-416.

[21]G. W. Knight, "Role," p. 87.

lationship and mutual dependence can be correlated without one destroying the other."

In conclusion, the above arguments all favor the decision that the role functions of men and women are normative but that the cultural expression of that relationship in the wearing of veils is not. The cultural language of the passage and its contextual thrust both support this view. Finally, a tradition-study of the passage bears this out. In v 2 Paul stresses the "traditions" (*paradosis*) handed down to them. Then in v 3 he expands on this theme: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ. . . ." At first glance it seems Paul is separating this from the catechetical teaching of the Church. However, the close connection between vv 2 and 3 makes it more likely that Paul is expanding it and that he draws together three "traditions": the Christ-man (creation), the God-Christ, and the man-woman teaching. Also, the creation passages support only the subordination theme, not the veils. Therefore, it is the subjection of the woman, not the wearing of veils, that was part of the early Church's catechesis. The latter was an application of the former. Yet in the midst of this there shines through a spiritual unity and equality between men and women that transcend both context and culture and that must also be recognized as normative (see below on Gal 3:28).

B. *1 Corinthians 14:34-36*

At the outset we must recognize a seeming contradiction between this and the passage just discussed. In 11:5 it is tacitly assumed that women "pray" and "prophesy" in churches, yet here they are commanded to "keep silent" and "ask their husbands at home" if they have any question. We might also mention here 1 Tim 2:12, "I permit no woman to teach." There are several answers that have been posited at one time or another:

(1) These verses are a later interpolation. Several western texts (D F G *et al.*) place this after v 40, but none omit it entirely, and therefore there is no textual evidence for such a decision.

(2) The activities of 11:5 are merely mentioned, not condoned, and they are disallowed in 14:34. Paul only alludes to a current practice in the former passage, where the stress is on veils; the teaching on the topic is found in 14:34, where Paul refuses them.[22] In favor of this would be general principles 1 and 2 above, which say the didactic passage must control the historical or incidental allusion. Against this would be the fact that Paul connects the worship activities of women in 11:5 with that of men in 11:4. It is difficult to make a case that he favors one but not the other.

(3) Praying and prophesying are not the same activity as speaking or teaching and therefore are allowed by Paul. They do not challenge the

[22]C. C. Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 74-78. G. W. Knight, "Role," pp. 89-90, mentions it as a possibility.

authority or headship of men, so they are not restricted.[23] The problem with this is 14:4-5, which connects prophecy with edification, and also Paul's use of prayers in his epistles to present his major teaching to his readers.[24] Therefore it is doubtful if Paul truly separated the two activities from the teaching function of the Church.

(4) There were two types of services: a public service for all, and a private service for believers only. Paul allowed women to participate in the latter but not in the former, where the unbelievers would be offended.[25] The main difficulty with this is the lack of hard evidence. Prohl claims to find evidence of the closed service in chaps. 10 and 11 (agape feast and eucharist) and of the open service in 14:21-23 (presence of unbelievers). While this may possibly point to the two types it cannot be said to yield a final solution, because Paul does not make any explicit link between the two passages in question and these two services.

(5) The problem of 14:34 deals with a specific difficulty in the Corinthian situation, namely with the tendency of the women to interrupt the dialogue section of the service with rude, unedifying questions. Paul refuses to allow this activity in this situation but does not give a blanket refusal to women's participation in the service.[26] However, there is no strong exegetical evidence for such a narrowing of Paul's intentions. While v 35 could narrow the scope to this, the negatives of v 34 ("keep silence," "not permitted to speak") seem more general than that.

The best solutions would probably be the last two (perhaps a combination of them),[27] although it is impossible to be certain. They have the fewest difficulties. However, we still must determine the situation and define the arguments used by Paul. The command to silence is connected with the idea of subordination and that in turn is modified by "even as the law says." The "law" (*ho nomos*) probably means Gen 3:16 and provides an argument similar to 1 Cor 11:8-9. The cultural background is also similar, although it is explicitly addressed to wives here (v 35, "ask their husbands"; cf. footnote 17).[28] Both Jew and

[23]G. W. Knight, "Role," p. 90, also labels this a possibility. This is the assertion of J. B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Cor. 11:2-16 and I Cor. 14:33b-36," *WTJ* 35 (1973) 203 (cited by Knight).

[24]This point is pretty well proven in G. P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers. The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge, 1974) 22-23, 156-157. He asserts that Paul's written prayers were didactic tools, summarizing his major themes.

[25]R. C. Prohl, *Woman*, pp. 29-30, 34.

[26]J. Olthuis, *Pledge*, pp. 140-141. Others limit it even further, to the use of tongues by the women. However, this is difficult to hold in light of v 35, which talks about asking questions (obviously they had been doing this in the Church).

[27]J. Héring, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (E. T. London, 1962) 154, has an interesting variant of these last two, saying that women may prophesy, etc., in church but could not participate in the discussion afterwards, due to the problems they were causing.

[28]This does not mean that it had no application to single women. It was probably assumed that they would ask their fathers at home; few single women would be living apart from their families. The reason for the explicit reference is found in the situation; it was the married women who were taking the initiative (this would be in keeping with first-century culture).

Greek considered it disgraceful for a woman to enter a discussion with men (cf. v 35, "it is shameful"); in fact, it was grounds for divorce.[29] The Corinthian women, by demanding their freedom and openly disputing with men in the public worship, were bringing shame upon the Church, before both God and men.

Austin Stouffer discusses two possible interpretations of the passage: that the problem relates to the subjection of the wife, or to the confusion caused by women asking questions. He argues[30] that the passage does not refer to the wife's subjection to her husband but rather to "the law" and that the law should be understood in a general sense to refer to the customs of the time. The teaching then has nothing to do with her status but applies only to the situation at Corinth. This is also propounded by Walter Kaiser, who asserts that the "law" is "a type of legalistic bondage newly raised by the Jewish community"[31] rather than the OT law. He believes Paul is quoting from the letter sent to him by the Corinthians (cf. 6:12, 8:8, 10:23).

While this is possible, the major difficulty lies in the articular *ho nomos*[32], which in the gospels refers directly to the Pentateuch rather than even the whole OT; there is simply no evidence in the NT for distinguishing oral interpretation from the written law. It seems more likely that Paul is again referring to the Biblical norm (subjection of the wife) being the accepted application of his day. However, this does not obviate either Stouffer's or Kaiser's thesis. It seems probable that Paul speaks to a circumstantial difficulty here and bases his injunction on the need for subjection.

When we apply hermeneutical principles, we again discover that the normative aspect is the wife's subjection to her husband. The cultural application deals with women's silence in the assembly. First, we have the situational code-word, "shameful" (*aischron*, v 35), tying the command to the Church's public relations. They were acting like they had an apostolic right to change Church practice and determine Church teaching (v. 36), and this was hurting the proclamation of the gospel. Second, the context of the passage, dealing with affronts to an orderly worship service at Corinth, favors the fact that this is the thrust of the injunction. Third, the subordination theme is the only creedal element

[29]See R. C. Prohl, *Woman*, pp. 33-34.

[30]A. Stouffer, "Hierarchy or Equality: Biblical Implications for Modern Marriage" (unpublished D. Min. Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1976) 54-59. He adapts the thesis of J. Olthuis, *Pledge*, pp. 140-141.

[31]W. Kaiser, "Paul, Women and the Church," *Worldwide Challenge* (September, 1976) 9-12, esp. pp. 9-10.

[32]We are not saying that articular *ho nomos* refers to the Mosaic law and anarthrous *nomos* to "a" law. No such distinction can be made. See W. Gutbrod, "*nomos*," *TDNT* 4, 1070, and Blass-Debrunner, sec. 258 (2).

in the passage.[33] Therefore we conclude that subjection, not silence, is normative for all times.[34]

C. *1 Timothy 2:8-15*

The pastoral epistles[35] deal primarily with ecclesiastical affairs and operate on the practical level. This passage occurs in a section (2:1-15) dealing with public worship.[36] There are two areas in question here: appearance and conduct. In vv 9-10 their attire was to consist of modest dress and good deeds. The language used to convey the former shows a definite cultural attachment. "Modest" (*aidous*) and "chaste" (*sophrosynē*, v 9) speak of feminine reserve and self-control in matters of sex; this probably means that their dress caused male worshipers to lust rather than worship God. Elaborate coiffures, jewels and costly clothes were common among wealthy Jews and pagans. Paul's command here relates to an ostentatious display for the sake of drawing attention to themselves. When we note the context, the point is made more certain. Paul is speaking of the church service and not general appearance. This is evident in v 8, "in every place men should pray," and in vv 11, 12. The refusal to teach must be restricted to the service, for Priscilla certainly taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), and Paul commended her (Rom 16:3).

Conduct at church meetings is next discussed. The woman is to "learn in silence" and neither to "teach" nor to "dominate" men (vv 11-12). This, of course, is similar to but more explicit than 1 Cor 14:34-35. This passage adds the implications of teaching in the first century, i. e., the idea of authority (*authentein*, a strong word indicating dominance or mastery). At that time, when a woman taught a group of men she would be "lording it over" them. As already stated, this was an affront to Jew and pagan alike[37] and was grounds for divorce. Women apparently were misinterpreting their Christian liberty to mean total emancipation from the old mores.

The reasons for the injunctions parallel 1 Cor 11:8, 9 but also are more elaborate. Paul now adds to the argument from creation (v 13;

[33]In v 34 "even as the law says" modifies "be subordinate," not "permitted to speak." The catechetical teaching dealt only with the doctrine of subordination, not silence in the Church.

[34]Knight, Ryrie, *et al.* curiously fail to note that they take 11:2-16 as cultural but 14:34-36 as normative. However, the tone and thrust of the two are the same. It is hermeneutically difficult to separate them; a consistent approach should recognize that Paul's stronger language is reserved for the veil passage and that if silence is normative, so is covering the head.

[35]We are assuming Pauline authorship of the pastorals. For a good survey of the issue see D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1970[3]) 584-622.

[36]W. Hendricksen, *I and II Timothy and Titus* (London: Banner of Truth, 1957) 103, says v 8 means only men are to pray in the service. However, two factors militate against this: (1) 1 Cor 11:5, which assumes women will pray in church (see above); and (2) v 8, which closes the passage in vv 1-7 and is not meant to be a contrast with women's duties in vv 9-10; rather it serves as a transition between the two sections.

[37]The Jews were especially strict. Women were not even allowed to teach their children. In both cultures, however, women were generally kept in an ignorant and misinformed state (see R. C. Prohl, *Woman*, pp. 51-54).

cf. 1 Cor 11:8, 9) the argument from the fall (v 14), which is actually the exegetical underpinning for the subjection command (see on 1 Cor 14:34-35 above). Quite possibly this may mean that the problem was more acute; the bluntness of the commands may also indicate this. At any rate, the allusion to the fall does not mean Paul questioned Adam's guilt. He clearly discussed this in Rom 5:12-21. The meaning here is priority of culpability. The woman became the instrument in deceiving the man,[38] and as a result the woman's "desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16b).

The Genesis passage is also reflected in v 15, which says she "will be saved through bearing children" and refers to Gen 3:16a, "In pain you shall bring forth children." The meaning of the verse is obscure and has occasioned a plethora of interpretations, [39] but most recent commentators agree that the following phrase is meant to modify "saved" here. Her role as female is to bear children, and her salvation is dependent on accepting her lot and "continuing in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." It is extremely doubtful that Paul believed a woman's salvation was contingent on her bearing children.

Here we have both aspects from the 1 Corinthians passages: appearance, and conduct in worship. In the first case there is no accompanying theological basis but only the phrase borrowed from v 8, "I desire that" (*boulomai*). Therefore Paul does not mean for this to be normative, even in the first-century Church. In fact, it is possible to argue that Paul was addressing only the situation reflected in the epistle and was not rejecting braided hair or jewels *in toto.* Instead, he was arguing for an emphasis on spiritual conduct rather than on elaborate appearance.

In the latter section we again see the balance between the normative principle (the woman's submissiveness) and the cultural application (not to teach but to be silent). There are no cultural code-words, as in the previous two instances. However, in the phrase "I permit" (*epitrepo*, cf. 1 Cor 14:34) there is a phrase similar to v 8, "I desire." Both may mean that Paul was giving his personal view rather than a divinely ordained command (cf. 1 Cor 7:10, 12, 25, 40[40]). The point at hand is that this may indicate a temporary rather than eternal ordinance.

[38]B. Krahn, "Women," p. 62, follows W. Hendricksen, *Timothy,* p. 110, in asserting that part of the sin was disregarding the created order and taking pre-eminence in the decision-making process. She should have deferred to her proper head, Adam. The problem is that the creation account gives no exegetical evidence for a hierarchical relationship before the fall. As D. and J. Boldrey, "Women," p. 19, say, her fault lay "not in 'usurping' Adam's authority . . . but in usurping God's."

[39]For example, "through the childbearing one," i. e. Jesus; "she will get safely through childbearing"; or "saved even though she must bear children."

[40]This does not mean that there was no sense of inspiration for Paul's own opinions (as some have taken these comments). The statement "I think that I have the Spirit of God" (v 40) definitely shows this. Rather it means that "this does not come from the *logia Jesu*" (cf. vv 10, 12) and "I have no direct command (i. e., revelation) from the Lord on this" (v 25).

Other aspects of this section that demonstrate this conclusion are similar to the Corinthians discussion. The cultural context of the passage is seen in the connection between vv 9-10 and vv 11-15; there is no true break between them, and both employ similar style. In fact, one could argue that vv 13, 14 apply to vv 9-10 as well as the silence-submission passage. The woman was to be modest in dress as well as in conduct in the worship service. Also the creedal element must relate to the woman's submission rather than her silence; the OT proof-texts only support the former, and the latter applies it to the cultural situation.

III. RELATED QUESTIONS

A. *Galatians 3:28*

Feminists are quick to argue that Gal 3:28 is the theological and hermeneutical key to the issue. Scanzoni and Hardesty say this is the only NT reference dealing theologically; the other passages on women deal "with practical concerns about personal relationships or behavior in worship services."[41] On that basis the Galatians statement, "there is no 'male and female,'" becomes the *crux interpretum*, and women in the new dispensation are completely equal to men.

Boldrey[42] notes the grammatical differences between "Jew nor Greek," "slave nor free" and "male and female" (*arsen kai thelu*). The "and" interrupts the "neither... nor" series in the others. He argues that it is a direct quote from Gen 1:27 and that therefore the new order introduced by Christ obliterates old distinctions caused by the fall. In this new order the equality of men and women transcends the old male/female dichotomy. According to this, the subjection injunctions were as culturally conditioned as the veil or silence commands; neither are applicable to this day.

The difficulty with the above view is that Paul felt perfectly free to assert equality in Galatians and hierarchy in the above passages (as well as in Eph 5:22-23, Col 3:18-19, 1 Pet 3:1-2). Paul did not believe there was a tension between the two, and we must ask why. The usual conservative interpretation is to take Gal 3:28 as reflecting spiritual equality in Christ and the others as teaching practical hierarchy in this life.[43] This also has difficulties, however, for it is hard to see the same spiritual/practical distinction in the case of Jew and Greek.

There is another possibility that I believe better fits the theological

[41]N. Hardesty and L. Scanzoni, *All*, pp. 18-19.

[42]D. and J. Boldrey, "Women," p. 10, following K. Stendahl, *Bible*, p. 32.

[43]See G. W. Knight, "Role," pp. 83, 91, who says they are "equal as image bearers... and, therefore, in their standing in and before Christ" but "manifest in their servility a difference created and ordered by God... subjection to men in the home and in the church."

context and a comparison of the passages. In the Body of Christ there is ontological equality and functional hierarchy. As persons, husband and wife as well as Jew and Greek or slave and free are equal—a partnership. Neither side is superior, nor is one more important than the other. At the same time there is a functional difference in the partnership, and this role is built on a hierarchical framework. The wife is equal to her husband in the marriage relationship, but must subject herself to him in her marital role. The "curse" of Gen 3:16 has not been obviated by Gal 3:28; however, it has been redefined in the context of Christ's new age.

B. *Ephesians 5:21-33*

It remains now to define exactly the principles of headship and subjection. We have asserted that they are normative principles; we have not stated how this functions in the Christian context. These concepts are best portrayed in Ephesians 5. Here we note first of all that the wife's subjection must be subsumed under the broader category of inter-Christian subordination. The "title" verse for the marriage passage is v 21, which says all believers are to "subject" themselves "to one another." In fact, v 22 has no verb but borrows its verb from v 21. This also favors the view that Paul is stressing not the wife's subjection but the husband's love (there are three verses on the wife's role, eight on the husband's role). Moreover, as Markus Barth ably argues,[44] there is no suggestion of inferiority in "submit." In the middle/passive, as here (the active is reserved for God alone), the idea is the voluntary act of an equal who "places herself under" another person. In the marital role it means simply that the woman freely accepts the headship of her husband. He has no right to demand it, much less to misuse it; he can only accept it from one who is his equal and partner in marriage.

"Headship" is similarly defined. In v 23 we have a conscious reflection of 1 Cor 11:3, discussed above. The God-Christ and the Christ-Church relationships are not built on a superior/inferior basis. They reflect an ontological equality and yet a voluntary functional subordination. The husband's headship must be defined by Christ's, and this means that self-giving sacrifice must govern his decision-making role. It does not mean simply that he controls the marriage; it means that his decisions are made on the basis of his wife's (and children's) best interests. This is why even his headship can be categorized under the mutual subjection of v 21; he "places" his selfish interests "under" his family's needs.

[44]M. Barth, *Ephesians* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 2. 708-709, 754-755.

C. *Woman in Community*

A major problem area, and one which is difficult to answer from the Biblical material, relates to the woman's position in the community. By and large, the ancients considered the woman's position to be relegated to the home, and therefore there is little discussion of her position in community life either in the Bible or in ancient literature in general. The creation pericope in Gen 2:21-22 definitely stresses the ontological equality of "male and female," [45] yet the legal codes give her an inferior relation to the man in the community. Her whole life was spent for the man, and in some ways she was even regarded as his possession (cf. Exod 20:17; Deut 5:2). When married, she went from the dominion of her father to that of her husband (1 Sam 18:17-18), and if widowed she came under the control of her oldest son. Her whole life was spent under the rule of a man.[46]

At the same time, however, while the woman had a lesser position legally,[47] this was not the case in religion or in divine commission. God ordained Miriam and Deborah to lead Israel, and Huldah the prophetess was consulted by Josiah when he discovered the law in the temple (2 Kgs 22). She could attend the cultic festivals (Deut 12:12; 2 Sam 6), and while she was excluded from the sacral offices she was able to worship the Lord equally with the man. Therefore we must conclude that while the main place of woman was in the home, she could on occasion (under the divine impetus) have an extraordinary impact on community life. It was in later Judaism that the reactionary movement against women took place.[48]

The comparative freedom of women was much greater in pagan society. In Greek culture the woman did have an inferior position (the Spartan culture is an exception); but the divorce laws, for example, were based on equality within marriage (divorce by common consent or either party, division of property, etc.). She had even greater status in Roman society, where there was a development toward egalitarian marriage and equal education for daughters and sons. Women had much greater liberty in society as a whole.[49]

[45]N. P. Bratsiodis, "*'iš*," *TDOT* 1, 227, says, "The primacy of the *'ish* over the *'ishshah* is only a primacy of age (the man was created before the woman). However, this cannot mean that the man has a natural or ethical superiority over the *'ishshah*, because God himself put the *'ishshah* as his elbow, indeed by his side.... Before God and in the presence of the woman, the man acknowledges... the equality of the partnership between *'ish* and *'ishshah* which God had established."

[46]See A. Oepke, "*gynē*," *TDNT* 1, 781. He says that the Sabbath was not required of the woman (Exod 20:8-9; Deut 5:12-13), but it seems more likely that it was simply a formula (cf. Deut 12:12; 16:11; cf. 31:12). Fidelity in today's terms was only demanded of the wife (while the husband could not commit adultery, he could have concubines or visit prostitutes).

[47]This was not absolute. The law definitely protected the woman from masculine tyranny (Amos 2:7), and most of the laws were directed to protecting both men and women. See H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (tr. M. Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 175.

[48]J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (tr. F. H. and C. H. Cave; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 359-376, has an excellent balanced discussion of this development (though he does not acknowledge differences with the OT period). The inferior position of women certainly extended into religious and community life.

[49]See A. Oepke, "*gynē*," pp. 777-781; M. Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (AB, New York: Doubleday, 1974) 657-659.

In the life of the early Church the situation lay between the ancient Israelite and Roman poles. Jesus ministered to women equally with men and numbers women among his friends, a radical concept to a Jew. His early resurrection appearances are to women, and he sends them to witness the fact to the apostles. The woman had great freedom in cultic life and could even exercise a teaching influence on males (as Priscilla with Apollos). In fact, the problems at Corinth and Ephesus were directly related to the new freedom of women in the Church community. We must conclude that women in the NT do have community relevance beyond that of the home and do take part in civic affairs (it is likely that Philip's prophetess daughters were sources for Luke's information regarding the early Church). There is definitely Biblical basis for the community involvement of women.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are two aspects to the passages on women in the Church, as established by applying consistent hermeneutical principles. First, the subjection of wives to their husbands is normative. As already stated, this does not mean the husband is absolute master of the home; indeed, his is the more difficult role. His "rule" must be typified by self-giving love. At the same time, however, the wife must voluntarily subject herself to his leadership. A truly balanced marriage must exhibit both these characteristics. Second, the cultural application of this principle as expressed by Paul is not normative. The woman need not maintain silence in church or wear a veil in worship. Nevertheless, if the culture today demands she adhere to these principles, she must do so. This is not a license for liberated Christian women to take the initiative in demanding their "rights." That is exactly the practice that Paul condemns in these passages. Rather, women must exercise their God-given gifts in such a way that God, not they, will be glorified in their particular cultural situation.

There are two applications of these principles yet to be discussed. The question of single women in society has been partially answered in the discussion of women in community. Many have interpreted subjection to mean that women should always accept the menial jobs, the ones without authority. The time-worn maxim is that "women are not made to be leaders," yet we have argued that this is a culture-bound interpretation; in this case it is not even bound to secular society (the basis for Paul's application) but rather to the Christian subculture. As Margaret Howe said in a recent essay,[50] women should be free to exercise their spiritual gifts in both Church and society.

This of course has far-reaching implications for the rigorous debate regarding the ordination of women. As we have argued here, there are no Biblical obstacles to this in western society, where "teaching" and

[50]M. Howe, "Charismatic Endowments and Leadership Roles (With Special Reference to the Place of Women in the Context of the Church)," paper read at Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, December 30, 1975.

"speaking" in the church no longer have the implications they did in the first century. Attitudes today have changed, and the teacher is viewed as one who shares his/her knowledge rather than as an authoritative giant whose every statement is *ex cathedra*. The same is true of the pastor-teacher: Recent developments in the area of sensitivity awareness and nouthetic counseling view the one who disciplines in the Church as a fellow member in the Body of Christ (and as one who himself/herself will need help at some time in the future).[51] This means that the pastoral role is no longer a threat to the subjection principle.

However, again we must say that women should not force the issue:[52] It is one thing to say that western society no longer has such cultural restrictions but quite another to conclude that women should everywhere take pulpits. There are pockets of conservative thinking where such a move would not serve the cause of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel is the overriding principle in a Scriptural lifestyle, and any actions that interfere with this are to be abandoned. Also, at such times the "weaker brother" principle would seem to make such a movement ill-advised. In "old-world" cultures where male dominance is similar to that of the first century, the issue should not be pushed. Instead, women should work within the cultural mores to change the situation in ways the culture can accept. Even here, however, the stress should not be on changing the culture but on magnifying Christ. That is the pre-eminent Biblical maxim.

[51]We must draw a distinction between leadership and authority. The first does not necessarily imply the second, at least not in an absolute way. For a woman to take the role of pastor or leader does not mean that she denies the authority of her husband in the home. In fact, many recent works on leadership stress the submissive role of the true leader, who has a servant attitude.

[52]However, there may be a call to consistency. Churches refuse to allow women to be pastors but send them into leadership roles overseas. Also, they allow women missionaries to speak in their services, and this is clearly contradictory to their interpretation of the passages.